

13 *Bad Holiday* **BREAKS** *And what (AND WHAT NOT)*

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You're on the road, camping in the wilds or enjoying two weeks at a remote cottage — far from pharmacies and clinics. Maybe there's no cellphone service in the area. Chances are, you'll run into some sort of emergent health problem. Here's what to do in a baker's dozen worth of out-of-the-blue situations — solutions from first-aid instructors at the venerable St. John Ambulance (SJA) and other experts.

This advice is intended only as first aid. You will have to put your holiday on hold and go for medical help if the mishap victim has a high fever or breathing difficulties, feels dizzy or faint, or experiences swelling and redness beyond the affected site. Bleeding that won't stop and severe pain, vomiting or diarrhea (especially with bloody stools) also require prompt medical attention.

1 THE STING



Running through a farmer's field of sunflowers, your five-year-old daughter is stung by a bee.

DO wash the sting area with soap and water. "Gently scrape out the stinger and venom sac with your fingernail, a knife blade or a credit card and relieve itching with a paste of baking soda and water," says Gary Jack, an educator with SJA's Burlington, Ont., branch. For a sting in the mouth, have your child suck on ice or flush out her mouth with cold water. If your child has trouble breathing, she may be having a serious allergic reaction — which could lead to anaphylactic shock. You must get her to medical aid right away. If she is known to be allergic to bee venom and you have her EpiPen, use it without delay

DON'T squeeze the stinger with tweezers or your fingers as this may inject more venom into the casualty, warns Jack.



to do about them

2 EGGS OVER QUEASY



A huge traffic jam delays your arrival at the cottage by two hours, but you're ravenous and eat the now slightly fizzy devilled eggs you picked up this morning at the supermarket anyhow. Next morning, you feel sick and suspect a touch of food-borne illness.

DO treat mild symptoms pretty much as you would the flu, according to Northern Lights Health Region in Fort McMurray, Alta. Increase your liquid intake with water, apple juice or tea to replace fluids lost through diarrhea or vomiting.

DON'T ignore severe or persistent symptoms or symptoms in the very young, the elderly or the chronically ill. Seek medical aid.

3 SUCKER-PUNCHED!

Playing in shallow water near the lakeshore, your youngster is latched onto by a leech.



DO calm and reassure the child, says Sylvain Lessard, manager of training for the SJA's New Brunswick Council in Fredericton. Place your fingernail or a credit card under the worm's front sucker to break the suction, then do the same at the other end. Applying a mentholated rub may cause the leech to detach itself voluntarily. Apply pressure for bleeding and ice for pain.

DON'T yank the worm off, as part of it may remain under the skin. And don't apply a burning cigarette, salt or harsh chemicals, as these may cause the leech to regurgitate blood and bacteria into the wound. "Don't allow your child to go back in the water, as that may increase the risk of infection at the wound site," says Lessard.

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4 WHAT'S BLACK AND WHITE AND SMELLS LIKE BURNING RUBBER?



Your 14-year-old son, sometimes none too fragrant in his own right, is sprayed by noxious vapours from the anal glands of a skunk.

(Is it just coincidence that mephitis, the Latin name of this badger relative, shares its first two syllables with that of the sulphur-breathing, hell-dwelling spirit Mephistopheles?)

DO have your son wash himself in a steady flow of water for no less than 15 minutes, says Lessard. "Make sure his breathing and vision are not impaired." A further application of tomato juice, lemon juice or a mixture of baking soda, vinegar and dishwashing detergent can help remove the residue and reduce the odour. "And if you're close to a town, there are de-skunking soaps and shampoos on the market," says Lessard. When changing clothes, cut off a tight T-shirt or golf shirt to avoid rubbing skunk residue on the face or in the eyes.

DON'T pull contaminated clothing over the face or head. "And don't let your son see you laughing, unless, of course, he's laughing too," says Lessard.

5

GOOD QUILL HUNTING

Your faithful golden retriever decides to retrieve a porcupine from underneath the cottage and gets a few quills in her muzzle.

DO assess the dog's state of distress, advises Dr. Hazel Eaglesome, a veterinarian at the Blue Cross Animal Hospital in Toronto. "This is a painful and frightening situation, and even the loveliest family pet will bite under these circumstances." Proceed to the next step only if you are absolutely sure you won't be bitten and only if there are fewer than 10 quills in her muzzle. (If the quills are many and widespread, or if any have lodged in her mouth or throat, take your dog to a veterinarian ASAP.)

Numb the area around the quills by applying an ice cube for one minute. While someone else holds the dog's head firmly, grasp the quill as close to the skin as possible with a pair of pliers and pull quickly and firmly. The quills are barbed, so it will be painful to remove them. Staunch any blood with tissue or gauze. Infection may set in, so if there is any swelling or discharge, see a vet for oral antibiotics.

DON'T cut the quills. And do not moisten them, as they will be more likely to break off when pulled. "Never take this condition lightly. Buried quill pieces can migrate throughout the dog's body and cause death," says Eaglesome.



6

NOSE FLOW

Your son gets a nosebleed on a remote stretch of Ontario highway between Wawa and Thunder Bay.

DO pull over and have him sit leaning slightly forward so the blood will not run down his throat. Keep his head above his heart. Gently pinch the soft part of the nostrils between your fingers for about 10 minutes. "If the bleeding doesn't stop, pinch the nostrils again and put a cold pack from your cooler on

the nose or the back of the neck," advises SJA's Jack. A nosebleed that won't stop requires medical attention.

DON'T lean his head back as the blood will run down his throat and cause a clot and possibly nausea and vomiting. After the bleeding stops, don't let him blow his nose for two hours and don't stuff tissues in his nostrils. Never panic: the nostrils have many superficial blood vessels and most nosebleeds look far worse than they really are.



7

PROSTRATED

Granny collapses after a day of picking wild berries in the hot sun. You suspect dehydration and heat prostration.

DO place Granny on her back with her feet slightly elevated. Give her as much water as she can drink safely — four to eight cups at a comfortable rate. "If you suspect heatstroke — the next step up — loosen her clothing and immerse her in cold water. Fan her, sponge her and place cold packs in the armpits and groin area," says Jack.

DON'T rub her skin with alcohol and don't over-cool her, as she may begin to shiver, and this will hinder the cooling process.

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8 BURNT OFFERING

A sudden gust of wind blows a red-hot ember from your campfire right onto your bare arm, causing a nasty but superficial burn.

DO immediately cool the burned area by placing it under cool water for 10 to 15 minutes. “Cool water reduces skin damage and minimizes pain,” says Jack. After cooling, apply a clean, dry dressing or cloth. Serious burns require immediate medical treatment.

DON'T apply butter, honey, lotions or ointments. These only seal in the heat. “And never break blisters. This could cause infection,” he adds.



9 LEAVES OF THREE?

LET 'EM BE!

Stooping to gather firewood near your campsite, you make skin contact with a poison ivy patch hiding out amidst more innocent vegetation. The culprit that causes the red, itchy and sometimes blistered skin reaction is urushiol, a greasy resin that lurks in all parts of the plant from the roots on up.



DO get as much of the resin off as possible. Flush the affected area several times with cold water and then wash with warm water and soap. Calamine lotion may stop the itching and cool the skin. It also leaves a dry crust that absorbs the oozing liquid. Oral antihistamines and topical corticosteroids may ease things, as may a paste of oatmeal or baking soda. “Put the juice of the stems and leaves of the orange-flowered jewelweed — also called the touch-me-not plant — on the rash to relieve pain and swelling,” says Jack. “This is Mother Nature’s apology for poison ivy and grows near it.” Change your clothes and discard or wrap the exposed garments for thorough washing.

DON'T scratch the rash and don't let contaminated clothing make contact with other areas of your skin.

10 CAMPFIRE GIRL

Nothing says cottage country like toasted marshmallows and hot dogs over a fire by the lake, but now your eight-year-old daughter is choking on a chunk of wiener.



DO keep calm, advises Morgan Jones Phillips, a paramedic in Toronto and author of the one-man play *The Emergency Monologues* (www.emergencymonologues.com). “If you panic, the youngster will take deep, panicky breaths, and that could make the lodged item go in even deeper.” If the child is coughing or struggling to breathe, she may have a partial airway blockage. If possible, call 911 and follow the instructions given. The operator may walk you through the Heimlich manoeuvre (abdominal thrusts). If your daughter cannot make noise and is turning blue, her airway is fully blocked. In just a few minutes, she could suffer brain damage or die. “In this situation, if you can safely hang the child upside down and shake her or pound her back, do it,” says Jones Phillips. “Gravity will help dislodge the object from the airway.”

DON'T pound a coughing child on the back while she is standing up. “You’re likely to loosen the foreign object, causing it to fall in deeper, and you’ll end up with a full obstruction,” Jones Phillips says. “As we say, if you can cough, you can breathe.”

11 SIDEWINDED!

While helping to portage the family canoe, your 19-year-old son is bitten on the leg by a rattlesnake.

DO calm and reassure your son to slow circulation of the venom and reduce shock, advises Jack. Place him at rest and keep him still to slow the progress of the poison. Remove constricting clothing and rings, and wash the bite area gently with soap and water. Splint the limb with materials at hand such as sticks to prevent movement but be careful to keep the bandages loose so they don't cause swelling. Keep the bitten limb above heart level. Seek medical attention, calling ahead if possible so that the venom antidote will be ready.



DON'T try to cut out the fang marks. And don't try to suck out the venom. Don't apply a tourniquet and don't apply cold to the site. Never give alcohol as this may accelerate the circulation of the poison.

12 HACKING IT

"Summer colds are worse than winter colds," as Granny always says. So if a child develops a stuffy nose and a sore throat and cough far from the pharmacy shelves...

DO gently flush out stuffy nostrils with lightly salted warm water (an eyedropper or even a small kitchen funnel will do). Keep your child well hydrated with fluids and give him a teaspoon of honey mixed with lemon juice to coat his ragged throat.

DON'T give honey to a child under 12 months of age as botulism spores present in the honey may lead to infant botulism.



13 TIME FOR A BREAK

Launching the motorboat, your spouse falls hard on a rock. You suspect a fractured ankle.

DO take a pillow or a blanket and fold it around the ankle at the heel. Tie it shut using a rope, a belt or a T-shirt torn into strips. "Always tie it above and below the fracture — never over the fracture," says Jones Phillips. This splint will reduce pain and further damage while you get him to the hospital where the fracture can be properly set and put in a cast. Keep ice on the fracture to reduce swelling. Give an over-the-counter painkiller such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

DON'T cut off the blood circulation to the foot with the splint. If the splint prevents blood flow, it will cause more damage than the fracture. "Don't give Aspirin as it will increase blood flow, thereby increasing bleeding and swelling," says Jones Phillips.

Your holiday packing should include a serious first-aid kit and manual. Here's hoping you can cope with health problems without heading back to town. And remember, if symptoms persist, see your doctor for follow-up once you've returned home. 🏠

